



University of Exeter

**COUNCIL**

**MINUTES AND ACTIONS – APPROVED BY COUNCIL**

28 February 2024

9.30am-1.15pm

Masters Suite, Penryn (Cornwall) and Online via Microsoft Teams

NB text in BLACK for publication; text in BLUE has been redacted for publication.

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Council Meeting

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- 23.60 Strategic Approach to Capital Plan
- 23.61 Artificial Intelligence
- 23.62 Exeter Students’ Union Panel Session

**Attendees:**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Quentin Woodley	Pro-Chancellor and Chair
Professor Lisa Roberts	President and Vice-Chancellor
Professor Tim Quine	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience)
Professor Dan Charman	Senior Vice-President and Provost
Sir Richard Atkins	Pro-Chancellor and Deputy Chair
Sally Cabrini	Pro-Chancellor and Senior Independent Governor
Damaris Anderson-Supple	Independent Member
Nicholas Cheffings	Independent Member
Andrew Greenway	Independent Member
Karime Hassan	Independent Member
Salam Katbi	Independent Member
Professor Malcom Skingle	Independent Member (online via Microsoft Teams)
Tim Weller	Independent Member
Alison Reed	Independent Member
Glenn Woodcock	Independent Member
Professor Barrie Cooper	Senate Representative
Professor Sue Prince	Senate Representative
Shades Chaudhary	Professional Services Representative

Connie Chilcott President, Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union  
 Alex Stanley Education Officer and Representative of the Exeter Students' Guild

**SECRETARY**

Mike Shore-Nye Senior Vice-President and Registrar & Secretary

**MEMBERS APOLOGIES**

Professor Karen Knapp Senate Representative  
 Sarah Matthews-DeMers Independent Member

**STAFF IN ATTENDANCE**

Dave Stacey Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Executive Divisional Director of Finance, Infrastructure and Commercial Services  
 Alison Chambers Chief Executive Officer, University of Exeter Guild of Students  
 Imelda Roberts Executive Divisional Director of Human Resources  
 Dr Jeremy Diaper Assistant Director, Governance (minutes)

**Minute Number 57 and 58**

Professor Richard Follett Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Engagement)  
 Alicia O'Grady Executive Divisional Director of External Engagement and Global

**Minute Number 59**

Nicola Sinclair Head of Widening Participation

**Minute Number 60**

James Hutchinson Director of Estates Services

**Minute Number 61**

Heather Haseley Director of Education Innovation

**56. Chair's Welcome and Declarations of Interest**

56.1 the Chair welcomed Council members to the annual Council meeting on the Penryn Campus.

56.2 the Chair noted that apologies had been received from Professor Karen Knapp and Sarah Matthews-DeMers and that Professor Malcolm Skingle was joining the meeting online.

**57. Global Reputation and Recruitment (CNL/81/23-24 Strictly Confidential)**

*The Chair welcomed Alicia O'Grady (Executive Divisional Director of External Engagement and Global) and Professor Richard Follett (Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Global Engagement) to the meeting.*

57.1 enhancing global reputation and international student recruitment remained critical to the long-term financial sustainability of the institution and strengthening the University's global brand and reputation would enable greater levels of recruitment which would in turn enhance the University's reputation;

57.2 whilst the University was currently operating in an extremely volatile external environment, continued efforts were focused on enhancing international recruitment in key strategic markets

to ensure it retained its competitive position compared to the Russell Group and other peer institutions;

57.3. an increasing focus of recruitment was on conversion activities in an effort to convert students aligned with the values of the University with the skills to succeed in the context of Exeter;

57.4. in relation to global brand and reputation:

57.4.1 University Education was one of the few brands that an individual was closely affiliated with throughout the duration of their lifetime and remained a constant in their future career paths;

57.4.2 an educational product was not simple to deliver or promote to audiences as there were a range of factors and complexity of interactions involved throughout the student recruitment journey, including: product, price, process, service delivery student experience and support;

57.5. in relation to international student recruitment:

57.5.1 the University typically had a shorter timeframe with which to engage prospective international undergraduate students and was challenging to promote the University to this audience as it was an increasingly competitive environment, with a number of prestigious institutions around the world vying for attention. By contrast the University often had more scope for building a reputation with home students in advance of them applying to the institution through engagement activities;

57.5.2. that there were a range of channels for students applying to study in the UK, including: applying via UCAS, pathway providers, global agents and sponsors;

57.5.3 the recent geopolitical uncertainty in relation to conflict in Ukraine and Middle East had created sector-wide challenges for international student recruitment;

#### **Closed Minute – Strictly Confidential**

**AGREED:** that Council would continue to maintain a clear focus on monitoring research performance in light of its critical importance to global brand and reputation.

#### **58. Exeter Foundation Year and International Year One Briefing (CNL/82/23-24 Strictly Confidential)**

58.1 Council welcomed the detailed assurance report which provided an overview of the Foundation and Pathway programmes offered at the University and further detail on the INTO Exeter joint venture to enhance the recruitment and support of international students. The immediacy of the institutional response and implementation of actions following the recent Sunday Times article on 27 January 2024 was also commended, including timely circulation of a briefing note to Council to address areas of concern;

58.2 the INTO University Partnership was a specialist education partner who assisted international students to study in the UK, US and Australia;

#### **Closed Minute – Strictly Confidential**

58.4 the partnership had rigorous quality assurance mechanisms in place to ensure the University's academic standards, student experience and outcomes were maintained;

58.5 whilst the University utilised agents in the recruitment of international students, it was one of the first universities in the UK to sign-up to the UK Agent Quality Assurance Framework which ensured integrity of agent relationships across the sector;

58.6 the University was working with the Russell Group and Universities UK to respond strongly to a recent Sunday Times article which had erroneously and misleadingly conflated entry standards for International Foundation Year and Foundation and International Year One programmes;

58.7 in discussion:

58.7.1 Senate representatives affirmed that there were clear mechanisms to maintain academic quality and standards and highlighted that their first-hand experience indicated that the academic calibre of students was consistently extremely high in a number of international year 1 programmes;

58.7.2 the Dual Assurance lead for Education affirmed there had been a number of deep-dives on the INTO provision which had reinforced that the University maintained rigorous, robust and transparent standards and quality control as with all entry requirements that ensured every student regardless of their pathway was at an appropriate standard to study;

*The Chair thanked Alicia O'Grady (Executive Divisional Director of External Engagement and Global) and Professor Richard Follett (Vice-President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Global Engagement) for their contribution to the meeting.*

#### **59. Access and Participation Plan (CNL/83/23-24 Strictly Confidential)**

59.1 the Chair invited Nicola Sinclair (Head of Widening Participation) to the meeting to deliver a presentation on Access and Participation;

59.2 Access and Participation was a key strand of the University's wider Success for all programme which aimed to address gaps in outcomes for student groups across all levels of study, home and international;

59.3 there were a number of challenges, in relation to access and participation, including the fact that the South-West had the biggest attainment gaps at secondary level and lowest progression to Higher Education in the country. However, there were improved application and progression rates to HE and the University of Exeter;

59.4 the South-West Social Mobility Commission had been established to drive forward transformational change in education and employment outcomes for disadvantaged young people in the South-West between now and 2050;

59.5 in relation to the Access and Participation Plan:

59.5.1 the Access and Participation Plan was a regulatory tool to ensure all students, from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake Higher Education, were supported to access, succeed in, and progress from Higher Education;

- 59.5.2 the University had met the commitments of the current plan (2021/21 – 2024-25), consistently meeting or exceeding all milestones in 2022/23 and achieving the most diverse student intake;
- 59.5.3 that the Access and Participation Plan had been a vehicle for positive change and there were a range of improvements across Pupil attainment & access, student success and research and evaluation;
- 59.5.4 the University had received recognition and endorsement for the approach to Access and Participation, including winning NEON University of the Year 2023 for work and progress to improve widening participation and outcomes for under-represented students and innovations through Success for All cited as 'quality' measures contributing to TEF Gold;
- 59.5.5 the new four-year Access and Participation Plan (2025/26 and 2029/30) was in the process of development and would be submitted to Council for approval on 23 May 2024, prior to onward submission to the Office for Students by the end of May 2024.
- 59.5.6 the new Access and Participation Plan would build on current measures and ongoing work within our 2030 strategy and emerging regional partnerships. The proposed focus would be on a number of key areas including: access, continuation into Year 2, Degree Awards, Progression to graduate outcomes;
- 59.6 in relation to state sector recruitment:
- 59.6.1 that Council noted with concern and disappointment that the proportion of state school educated students at Exeter had been persistently low in comparison with the sector for over a decade. It was recognised that a number of actions had been initiated over 2021-23 to enable improvements to state sector recruitment and state sector intake had increased to c. 73% in 2022 exceeding the interim target;
- 59.6.2 the above improvements in the state sector position had reversed in 2023 and there had been a sharp reduction in qualified state sector applicants, due to a combination of external and internal factors, including: the cost-of-living crisis and ongoing impact of Covid on changes in applicant behaviour and predicted grades.
- 59.7. whilst state school applications were down by c. 0.9% in the 2024 cycle admissions position, an action plan was being implemented to improve the state sector position;
- 59.8. the importance of the following in discussion: developing more powerful and compelling marketing communications and positive narratives to counteract the potential perception of the University of Exeter as an institution principally for students from higher socio-economic backgrounds; enhancing the culture across the University to instil a greater sense of belonging amongst students from different socio-economic backgrounds, age groups and ethnicities; continuing to review and evaluate implementation plans and key data (eg completion data) to identify key areas of learning to enable the University to identify and address issues; continuing to co-create and co-design solutions in collaboration with students to optimise impact; focusing on narrowing ethnicity awarding gaps and continuing improvements in award of good honours and first-class degrees; recognising that the impact of external factors (such as cost of living) could become more pronounced and have increasing impact on Student Mental Health and state sector recruitment; developing a wide-ranging contextual admissions approach to ensure UK students from a disadvantaged or underrepresented background to ensure students were not disadvantaged in the application process; ensuring high-levels of

graduate employability and access to business, industry and employers to encourage disadvantaged students to apply for employability prospects; that it would be useful to explore data to determine if there was anything else other than conditional offers which could be utilised to support student applications from underrepresented groups.

**AGREED:** that the Access and Participation Plan would be scheduled for Council approval and sign-off on 23 May 2024.

**60. Capital Strategy Update (CNL/84/23-24 Confidential and CNL/84a/23-24 Confidential)**

- 60.1 the Senior Vice-President and Provost and Senior Vice-President and Registrar & Secretary jointly delivered a presentation on the Capital Strategy;
- 60.2 the University's built estate was critical to enable Strategy 2030 objectives, but the teaching space was currently at capacity and constraining future growth, creating teaching inefficiencies and adversely impacting on the academic and student experience;
- 60.3 a version of the capital plan was presented to Council in November 2023 which proposed £1.1bn of investment to support the core strategic drivers of Strategy 2030, including: Research Power Growth; STEMM Growth; High Margin and Financial Sustainability; Excellent Education and Student Experience;
- 60.4 in response to the emerging sector-wide financial challenges, political uncertainty and volatile international student recruitment position, the funding envelope for the capital plan had been revised to £765m and rationalised by £353m over the period of the 10 year capital plan;
- 60.5 in relation the major strategic initiatives:
- 60.5.1 the major strategic initiatives were those which had a capital expenditure of over £5m, were considered critical to the delivery of the 2030 Strategy and would deliver on key strategic priorities and contribute to the strategic ambition to make the world Greener, Healthier and Fairer;
- 60.6 in relation the prioritised investments:
- 60.6.1 a strict prioritisation of capital investment had been undertaken to best support the delivery of Strategy 2030 objectives, directly enable margin growth, return on investment and delivery of an exceptional student experience;
- 60.6.2 the resequencing of the major initiatives had been based upon the strategic drivers and dependencies for delivery (including space, time and resources). The proposed delivery plan outlined the intended initiatives over the years 1-3 to meet the strategic goals. However, the plan would be reviewed and revised regularly to ensure the University remained able to pivot in the face of new challenges and opportunities. Year 4 onwards of the plan would be more clearly defined in later iterations of the major initiatives;
- 60.6.3 the proposed investments were focused on research and teaching space to generate financial margin to sustain the capital plan, whilst simultaneously supporting our market positioning relative to competitors, and enhanced our ability to attract international students and world-leading academics;

60.6.4 significant budget (c. £117m) was retained for decarbonisation of the existing estate and ongoing investment into IT infrastructure (c. £60m) to support our digital strategy;

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**ENDORSED:** the framework of major initiatives and prioritised and de-prioritised investments, noting that individual Business Cases would be provided in due course with full details of costs and benefits;

**AGREED:** that a further update would be provided to Council on the revised long-term maintenance strategy, including further clarification surrounding the alignment between the long-term maintenance strategy and approach to decarbonisation of the estate;

**AGREED:** To circulate a ‘deep dive’ video presentation to Council providing further information about the St Luke’s Masterplan framework ahead of the public consultation and exhibitions in April 2024;

**AGREED:** that an overall people impact assessment would be undertaken as part of the development of the capital plan to consider both the potential impact on staff alongside the long-term strategic benefits for staff;

**AGREED:** that further consideration would be given to required access improvements, to ensure that key accessibility requirements were factored into the budget for long-term maintenance;

**AGREED:** that further consideration would be given to enhancing the level of investment in Streatham Library optimisation, in recognition that it was still important to ensure there was additional study space capacity during peak times within the exam period.

### **61. Generative Artificial Intelligence (CNL/85/23-24 Confidential)**

61.1 that Higher Education sector was still in the early days of the Artificial Intelligence journey, with the true potential yet to be fully explored. Artificial Intelligence presented a significant opportunity for education, research and business process evolution;

61.2 AI also presented a series of challenges around academic integrity, ethics, data and cyber security. Strategies and mitigations were in the process of development to address these challenges and they would continue to be explored;

61.3 Council noted the different definitions of AI, including: Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and Generative AI, and the large language model;

61.4 the global University sector was engaging with AI in a range of different ways, including institution-wide partnerships, multi-million pound institutes and seed funds. This included:

61.4.1 Arizona State University who had partnered with OpenAI to integrate generative AI into the core of its educational framework and to make AI a fundamental part of the academic lives of students to prepare them for future job markets and learning environments;

61.4.2 the University of Edinburgh who had announced the Generative AI Laboratory (GAIL) to develop safe and innovative solutions for industry and government;

61.4.3 Stanford University's Faculty Seed Grants for projects on generative AI in learning contexts were being offered through the Stanford Accelerator for Learning and the Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence;

61.5 in relation to education and generative AI:

61.5.1 Virtual Learning Environments were integrating AI as a foundational tool, with Instructure and Khan Academy announcing a partnership that brings together Canvas, the learning management system, with Khan Academy's AI powered student tutor and teaching assistant, Khanmigo;

61.5.2 a range of mitigations had been introduced to ensure academic integrity in the age of AI, including: revising assessment practice through Curriculum for Change, training of staff and students to establish AI literacy; continued revision of policies to keep pace with change; integrating AI as part of the assessment process and locking internet browsers/digital access during exams in a secure way;

61.6 in relation to the UK sector context:

61.6.1 the OfS had not yet engaged specifically on the issue of Generative AI, but the OfS board had received an update last year and was scheduled to discuss again in February 2024.

61.6.2 the Department for Education (DfE) had issued a consultation on the opportunities and risks for GenAI in Education, which the University had contributed to and been referenced in;

61.6.3 the Russell Group had published a statement in July 2023 on new principles on the use of AI in Education, which will shape institution and course-level work to support the ethical and responsible use of generative AI, new technology and software like ChatGPT. The University had also participated in a Russell Group roundtable consultation on Gen AI in education;

61.6.4 the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education had also recently explored the challenges and opportunities of navigating the complexities of artificial intelligence era in Higher Education;

61.7 Council noted the range of activity that had been undertaken in relation to AI, including Faculty workshops and consultations, amendments to the TQA manual and the publication of StudyZone resources to help develop comprehensive study resources for students. It was also noted the University remained committed to continued investment in Artificial Intelligence to realise the significant potential for enhancements across research and education. A range of opportunities in relation to AI were continuing to be explored, including piloting use of Microsoft Co-Pilot;

61.8 Council also noted the risks and opportunities in relation to the application of AI in research dissemination evaluation and management, including the role of the Institute for Data Science and Artificial Intelligence (IDSAI) in driving research in advanced data science and current research strengths on climate, environment, sustainability and health;

61.9 the following was noted in discussion:



- 61.9.1 that in light of ChatGPT's significant energy consumption, further consideration would need to be given to the environmental impact of any significant usage of AI. It would also be important to consider opportunities for the institution to utilise its academic expertise to explore the challenges surrounding the intersection of AI and environmental sustainability, including exploring sustainable solutions and sustainable energy sources;
- 61.9.2 that further consideration should be given to how to empower the wider University community to utilise AI to enhance and streamline processes and procedures and to encourage small-scale experiments to help enhance AI literacy and understanding amongst students and staff;
- 61.9.3 the importance of developing a clear institutional strategy and guidance on the use of AI to provide clear direction to staff and ensure robust processes surrounding data integrity;
- 61.9.4 that it would be important to continue to review and reassess wider implications for assessing students and changes in pedagogical practice across all disciplines and ensure there was sufficient guidance to staff on how to maintain academic integrity, including redesigning assessments to include utilisation of AI and incorporation of assessment that was 'AI proof' (including project-based and portfolio based assessment). Consideration would also need to be given to ensuring the student wellbeing and EDI implications of a change in assessment to ensure there was an inclusive assessment model that did not disadvantage students from different demographics;
- 61.9.5 that it would be useful to explore the possibility of academic partnerships around other leading institutions to draw on the wealth of wider expertise from across the sector.

## **62. Student Panel Sessions**

- 62.1 two question and answer student panel sessions were facilitated by the President Exeter and other representatives of the Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union to gain insight into the specific experiences of students located at Penryn. A number of issues were highlighted, including:
  - 62.1.1 the distinctive campus community environment which provided a welcoming and relaxing setting for students and a creative and diverse student experience in light of shared campus with the University of Falmouth;
  - 62.1.2 some of the challenges experienced in relation to the cost-of-living crisis; securing affordable and suitable student accommodation; commuting as part of study Placements; late tuition fee payments; lack of variety of affordable food options on campus;
- 62.2 opportunities for increased student support, including:
  - 62.2.1 signposting academic guidance and support prior to arrival (including guidance on assignments, plagiarism and different referencing styles);
  - 62.2.2 enhancing opportunities for summative feedback prior to assessment;
  - 62.2.3 providing more guidance and support in relation to finding and securing affordable accommodation in the local region.